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## The Pure Flame

Nearly three hundred years ago a wise English physician, Sir Thomas Browne, remarked, "Life is a pure flame and we live by an invisible sun within us." Last autumn another wise physician, Dr. Alexis Carrel, observed, "The education dispensed by schools and universities consists chiefly in a training of the memory and the muscles, in certain social manners, in a worship of athletics. Are such disciplines really suitable for modern men who need, above all other things, mental equilibrium, nervous stability, sound judgment, audacity, moral courage, and endurance?"

The answer is no. Such disciplines are not suitable, neither are they sufficient. But the youth of America have within them the potentialities of mental equilibrium, nervous stability, sound judgment, audacity, moral courage, and endurance. These qualities are the invisible sun within us. And the most important problem before us is how to clear the air around us in order that our lives may be pure flame and not smoking stub-ends of candles sputtering in the socket.

I am sorry to tell you, if you don't already know about it, that the world in general isn't much troubled by this problem. It cares a little, but it doesn't care very much. Just enough to make mild and harmless dinner conversation. It is unlikely to go out of its way to do anything to remedy it. For this reason we are compelled to be serious and insistent about it. We cannot long abide indifference, and cold selfishness. They are the world's most virulent, and most dangerous of contagious diseases.

That is just another way of saying that the world is in a bad way. Don't let that frighten you too much. The world has always been in a bad way. Some say it got in a bad way on Eve's first bored afternoon in the Garden of Eden. Others blame it upon the first young generation represented by Cain and Abel. At any rate, Amos found it crumbling in 740 B.C. when he left his sheep fold on the hills above the Dead Sea and journeyed up to that

wicked city of Samaria where the citizens lay upon beds of ivory and drank their wine from bowls, enriched by cheating the widows and selling the poor for a pair of shoes. It had not improved noticeably when Jesus walked through Palestine to be crucified by selfish men without vision. It was pretty bad in 1917. Mr. Hoover and Mr. Smith find a few things wrong even in 1936. I myself have lived upon the earth the first half my three score and ten. I myself have seen changes in everything except the titles of sermons and of commencement addresses. These are still "The Challenge of the Present Crisis."

I do not mean to be disrespectful to the inevitable crises. They are exceedingly dangerous affairs. I only want to warn you that they are certain to come, and that you must be ready to face them at any moment with a valiant spirit and a resilient mind.

I know them pretty well by now, having lived through the War and the peace, and this far into the Depression and the present chaos in Ohio. I measure each word, when I say that none of these crises has been more dangerous and more demanding than the present one. No man can look upon the fair state of Ohio in 1936 without sorrowing for its betrayal and debauching, without weeping over its systematic plundering and hamstringing. A rich, and beautiful state once marching proudly among the leaders with head up-lifted and singing, brought to its knees in National disgrace by the malevolent destructiveness of its prodigal sons in high place who show no sign of repentance.

This situation is humiliating and discouraging. For that very reason we must be alert and on guard against those cunning enemies: indifference and despair. It is easy to grow indifferent because these crises are familiar occurrences, and we become fatalistic and accommodate ourselves to them. Most people find it more comfortable to shrug their shoulders than to meet a challenge. It is also easy to fall into despair and accept defeat simply

because the evil to be put down is tenacious and persistent. I earnestly warn you against these pitfalls. We must cherish our enthusiasm for life and our vision for the future, and we must be wary lest our repeated failures to attain our ideal of perfection reduce us to complacency and acquiescence in things as they are.

I would have you remember in season and out that nothing endures without renewal. The good life demands the constant <sup>and</sup> continual recreation of the values by which men live on this earth. It demands struggle and positive action to beat down militant evil, to build up and maintain the good. We must all relearn this elemental truth. For a long time now we have drifted with the current with our eyes covered. We got into the unhealthy habit of believing that our forefathers had made our Republic and this Commonwealth secure for all time by some magic incantation embodied in a constitution. Now we begin to see that even constitutions must be recreated under pressure of need. And we are also made shockingly aware of the destructive power of evil that is legally possible within that sacred framework where some irresponsible agent chooses to run amok. We have had more than one lurid example of the danger to which we are exposed when we permit even a momentary lapse of moral courage, audacity, sound judgment and endurance vigorously directed toward the creation and maintenance of private and the common good. We have been like the foolish pioneering farmers who sow crop after crop on the cleared land without refertilizing it or protecting it from erosion. The soil wears thin and the people starve.

I speak soberly on this point because it is a crucial matter of this once great commonwealth of ours where I and most of you must maintain our vision or perish. We shall not perish. We must create. But we cannot create by adopting a timid, pusillanimous, compromising attitude on issues that demand noble and courageous action. When those few civilized achievements of the unselfish efforts of the human race are threatened, we cannot abide supine acceptance and ignoble surrender. We must have audacity, and a belief



in the potency of truth and good will over falsehood and malicious selfishness. There are a few things still worth dying for. Among them are integrity in public and private affairs; the right of all men to an untrammelled exercise of the mind in search of truth and beauty, concrete and social as well as abstract and physical; and freedom of discussion in order to create, to preserve, to make known, and to make prevail the discoveries in the interest of the general welfare. That is the highest adventure possible to men upon the earth. It is sacred and must be held inviolate. It is the sole function of a university. It is the common enterprise of a university, its graduates, and the public whom they serve.

Emerson used to say that things simply refused to be mismanaged long. But that confidence rested upon the assumption that each successive generation would have an edge to its goodness and that it would boldly create and recreate the good. If that is the primary obligation of every generation of men, and I believe that it is, then no generation was ever offered greater possibilities than those now presented to you. You cannot cry in despair that there are no more worlds to conquer! You see before you a world beautifully equipped to meet the elemental needs of men, and supplied with well-nigh perfect devices for production. But it lies there inert and imponderable like some god-formed Adam shaped from the primordial clay awaiting the breath of life to animate it and drive it forward. Is it too much to ask that you should place a high value upon the energy and the vision which are God's gift of pure sun to you, and that you should refuse to accept such a sorry muddle as the best the human mind can create out of such prodigious resources? I cannot believe that it is. What do you propose to do with your time, your energy, your education, now that you are going out into what the orators always speak of as life? I shall watch you with immense concern.

For, by the accident of time, I belong in the rear ranks of the generation that was taught to produce Things. The slogans were: Make two blades of

grass grow where only one grew before. Make two deans flourish where only a president formerly bloomed. Bigger and better. Watch us grow. And we grew like a rank weed. Everything got warped out of perspective because the values were confused. I have seen the good people of this state and friends of this university, under the spell of this phobia for ill-considered bigness, eagerly build for you a magnificent stadium in which to cultivate your idiocy. And I have watched them at the same time resolutely refuse to give you anything but an antiquated shack containing a few dog-eared volumes to aid you in cultivating your intelligence. Our tiny library does what it can, but for it to try to serve 12,000 students and a large faculty is very much like trying to transport a modern football squad to the Michigan stadium in a Model T Ford. I have seen the responsible authorities of this state buy luxurious office rugs and magnificent spittoons for the comfort of expectorating politicians. And I have watched them steadfastly refuse to provide you with an auditorium that would be at least the equal of a respectable Ohio barn.

In other words, it has been an age of gigantic confusion. Our marvelous productivity was woefully circumscribed in its vision. We wanted things. And did we produce them? Radios, automobiles, roads, skyscrapers, athletic fields, ticker tape, prisons, munitions, wars, boons, depression, chaos! We had the fundamental laws of life well formulated: Values always go up; concentrate wealth in the hands of the few and prosperity will filter down to all; this high level can be made constant if we buy luxuries from anticipated income. The tragedy is that we left out of account or actually destroyed the only values worth the candle: the enrichment of our personal life and our public institutions through mental discipline and rational direction of our creative energies. No wonder we crashed. It reminds me of a lively but immature colt I once owned. I hitched him to a wagon load of lumber one day and drove him through the gate. While I was closing the gate he lunged onward, ran down the driveway, and crashed in chaos into the open door of the barn.

While we were occupied with our wild, undirected, upward flight we neglected to participate in public life or we watched with cynical indifference the flagrant misconduct of our common enterprize. We progressively lost faith in public men, we withdrew from politics, we cultivated an appalling indifference to scandal. Partly as cause, partly as result, we have had few men in political life whom we could look up to with confidence or respect. Instead of recreating these necessary values, we merely called our politics Dirty and proceeded to wash our hands.

But other hands were not washed and were not withdrawn. Their dirty fingers have left their mark all over our state and nation. They have cooperated with the worship of brute force and armed or massed coercion which the War exalted. They have tried and are trying to destroy the freedom and the efficiency of our educational institutions and to curtail the liberties of our citizens. When they do not boldly attempt to forbid freedom of speech, they do it indirectly by persecuting men for acts they have not committed.

Certain high public offices have been used by selfish, ignorant, or brazenly malicious men to hamper or destroy those unselfish and constructive institutions which keep alive the hope of a people. The work of honest, incorruptible men whose sole end is the welfare of a great state cannot be destroyed. But it is being obstructed and delayed. The price is not only impaired efficiency, but also the farther degeneration of the public offices themselves. Neither can afford the cost. And yet this is the condition of the inheritance into which you now go forth.

You must enter it in a spirit of determined creativeness. You must cultivate it with sound judgment, moral courage, audacity, and endurance. It will require a long period of time. But the invisible sun within you is pure flame. Any transformation you think desirable in the life of your state can be effected by you.

And I warn you again that you are going into a world that is only mildly interested in you. It will have few jobs to offer you. It will not even be torn with grief that this is so. The minute you leave this campus you will encounter a world coolly hostile to the things we have taught you to value. It will begin immediately to exact an ignoble conformity of you. It will try to destroy your precious individuality. It will demand your acquiescence in a chaotic and mismanaged world. It will resist your efforts to make public life clean and serviceable. It will call you by whatever ugly name is fashionable when you oppose brute force and mass hysteria in a republic of free men. It will ask you to accept poverty and idleness as the inevitable lot of large numbers of your fellow citizens. It will try to dim your vision of a brighter and a happier Ohio. It will try to beat you down into one of those ugly, drab, gossipy villages where the flame will be stifled unless you are alert and of strong courage.

For it is a world that thinks but little and reads still less. You have been taught the use and the companionship of books. It hasn't been done as well as we would wish because we have been denied necessary facilities. But outside these halls, only two books per capita circulate in our public libraries, and only one per capita is bought and privately owned. This is symptomatic of a world that cries from every market place and every politician's office: Millions for Highways and Munitions, but not one cent for Minds. You will be bombarded on every side by insidious propaganda calculated to defeat you the minute you are off your guard, and lead you to believe that things cannot be otherwise. And if you keep the pure flame burning, you will be called a visionary. Don't let that word frighten you. It is an ancient and honorable epithet. Without vision the people perish. Is it so impossible to recreate and propagate the values which sustain us?

You have spent four years in this University. You have had a practical demonstration of the possibility of a great, common enterprise functioning



for the sole purpose of discovering and propagating truth and enriching the lives of men. It is an organization of some 15,000 people, the population of a large town. It is not perfect or complete, but it is an example of the fact that men can unite in a common constructive purpose, that each can make his own contribution according to his special talents, that selfish and personal ends can be subordinated to the general good, that rewards for individual worth are not necessarily financial, and that the mere possession of wealth does not entitle any man to a position of privilege. The success and continuation of such an organization of men is a portent of the possible future of a wider society. In that far off day when the state of Ohio shall be administered in the same spirit of devotion and self-sacrifice that goes to the conduct of university affairs, you will see, or your children after you will see, a commonwealth mighty in power to further the development and the welfare of its citizens.

In your efforts to make known the good and to cause it to prevail, you must be patient, but you must not be too patient. Job is an excellent model, but he has been badly misrepresented. He was patient in personal suffering. He was boldly impatient when truth was betrayed. You have been taught one saying of his: "Though He slay me yet will I trust Him." Let me remind you that the declaration does not end there. The next word is but. And Job adds boldly and audaciously: "But I will maintain mine own way before Him."

The difficulties are immense, but they are not insuperable. You will not long remember these words of advice which I have given you. I hope you will remember what I am about to quote from Ann Morrow Lindbergh. In that beautiful book of hers, "North to the Orient," she reports a scene at Ottawa where officials and aviators are trying to persuade her husband to abandon his journey or change his course because of the difficulties he may encounter.

He then declares his faith. "I like to feel that in flying" - my husband faced them - "I can mark one point on the map for my position and another point for my destination, and that I can draw a straight line between the two, and follow it. I don't like to deviate for possible difficulties en route. I'd rather prepare for the difficulties."

I do not know of any other way by which you can survive. But that adventurous way is sufficient. You need not succumb. Tear down all that is useless and outworn. In a spirit of courage, sound judgment, and endurance build what seems to you good, desirable, and beautiful. And in moments of doubt, remember the words of Ulysses:

One equal temper of heroic hearts,

Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.